

R Cultivator 416

Chapter 416: Mysterious Encounter

It's been three months since the 'Fake' Phantom Pirates made their theatrical entrance at Veins Peak. Though they hadn't stirred any trouble since their shadowy debut—a ship cloaked in darkness emerging like a ghost and vanishing just as mysteriously—their reputation still loomed over the island like a lingering mist.

Whispers filled the streets, inns, and tea houses. "Did you see that ship's shadow? It vanished!" some said.

Others speculated about their origins, their powers, and most of all, the inevitable clash with the real Phantom Pirates.

With the grand auction approaching and the tension between the two so-called Phantoms mounting, the entire island was abuzz with anticipation.

After the showy arrival, Tyler had used high-grade concealment arrays to hide the ship near a desolate cliff, far from the busy ports.

The shadow of the ship that had once lingered on the water vanished within days, but the impression it left behind was etched in every mind.

Tyler just wanted to show off. Besides, it's not possible to hide a ship in shadow for too long. This time, it worked only because the shadow remained still.

Veins Peak was a vast island with five villages, three towns, and one central city nestled around a towering mountain cracked like an open vein—a natural formation that gave the island its name.

The port town thrived with mercantile activity, but it was in Rogue Town, a quieter trade center, that Tyler found himself one lazy afternoon, casually strolling into a quaint pastry shop.

Just as Tyler stepped in to browse the colorful tarts and buns, another man arrived beside him. There was nothing extraordinary about the man at first glance—a bit of stubble, simple clothes, and not a hint of cultivation aura. But Tyler's instincts flared. Something was wrong.

The man gave a pleasant smile. "You like pastries too? This place has the best almond buns on the island."

Tyler managed a polite smile. The air around the man felt too calm. The North's ambient energy was too intense for ordinary mortals, and yet this man looked completely unaffected. Like hell he is a mortal. There is no mortals past Ixalaria Continent.

They purchased their pastries, and the man turned to him casually. "So, what should I call you? Phantom Blackwood? Or Tyler White?"

Tyler paused, a flicker of caution in his eyes. He was clearly surprised, but he did not show it. He just nodded. "What about you, Senior?"

The man chuckled, eyes gleaming. "You can call me 'senior' for now. If fate allows, you'll learn my name someday."

"Of course, Senior," Tyler said, following the man's lead as he walked away from the pastry shop.

They strolled down cobbled streets into a quieter alley lined with old stone buildings. The sounds of the town faded behind them.

"Aren't you curious how I found you?" the man asked.

"I figured you'd tell me eventually," Tyler replied.

"You hid yourself well. Charms, artifacts, even layered arrays. Not many could track you. Took me some time."

"But you still did." Tyler's voice was calm, even amused. "Why go through the trouble?"

"Curiosity. And a question." The man looked up at the sky briefly before turning down another alley.

"I'm listening."

The man didn't answer immediately. They passed children playing with floating spirit marbles, their novice auras flaring now and then.

"You have wealth, a powerful crew, resources beyond imagination. You could hide out comfortably and ascend to immortality in a few thousand years without ever lifting a sword. Why come to the North?"

Tyler took a moment. "Isn't that why everyone comes here? The Eternity"

"Why do you think people cultivate?" the man asked.

Tyler pondered. "Some seek fame, others power. Some chase longevity. Then there are those with lofty dreams— of justice, heroism, changing the world."

"Lofty dreams," the man echoed, smirking. "Rare and extreme."

They walked in silence for a few moments.

"You don't seem like a killer," the man added. "Your aura lacks the stain of blood. Do you even plunder and burn like a true pirate?"

Tyler laughed lightly. "I took the pirate identity for convenience. To be free. It's a good mask for recklessness."

"Freedom." The man nodded. "Dangerous kind of freedom, though."

They spoke for a while longer. The man's questions were layered, not just philosophical but strangely personal. It felt like a test. Tyler answered truthfully, cautiously.

Finally, the man stopped.

"Thank you for indulging an old man," he said. "Consider this a gift, for our first meeting."

He reached forward and tapped Tyler's glabella.

A sharp jolt of cold invaded Tyler's consciousness. A thin, dark streak leaked from his brow and vanished into thin air.

Tyler's eyes narrowed. "What was that?"

No answer came. The man was gone. Not even spatial ripples remained. Tyler stood alone in the alley, hand at his brow.

Moments later, familiar voices called out.

"Tyler! Where were you?"

"Are you alright?"

"Even Mana couldn't track you. The Ghost Spirit Bond didn't work."

Lily, Mathilda, and Mana appeared, clearly alarmed.

Tyler smiled. "I'm fine. I just met... a new friend."

They frowned, unconvinced, but said nothing.

Far, far away, over a stormy sea thousands and thousands of kilometers away, the mysterious man stood suspended in the sky. Wind howled around him, but he was unaffected.

Before him floated a twisted, broken structure. It resembled a cube, but its angles defied logic, like something half-formed from a dream.

Within the cube's mirrored layers, a version of Tyler White floated in mid-air—but this one bore crimson scales and obsidian wings, his body pulsing with dark energy.

Inside the cube, Tyler opened his glowing red eyes and touched his glabella.

"He did it," he muttered with a smile.

Outside, the man scoffed. Then vanished into the void.

Two Months Later...

"Roses are red,

The sun gives off heat,

If you're ever tired,

Use my face as your seat."

Mathilda recited the shameless poem with a grin, her voice rich with playful mischief. The young maiden serving their drinks turned crimson in an instant, nearly spilling the tray in her hands.

Tyler let out a sigh, rubbing his temples. "Yeah... she's started again."

Mathilda leaned in closer, a wicked gleam in her eyes. "Oh come on. It's not like you don't join the fun when I finally drag her into our bed."

"You really don't need to drop pick-up lines like that for it to happen," Tyler muttered under his breath.

"Oh?" Mathilda smirked. "Then show me how it's done, Mr. Smooth."

Tyler raised a brow. "You want me to demonstrate?"

"Try your luck," she challenged, waving toward the blushing waitress who was attempting to pretend she hadn't heard any of it.

With a casual stretch, Tyler stood up and strolled over to the girl. He leaned in and whispered something soft and private—his tone low and melodic.

The girl's reaction was immediate. Her eyes sparkled, cheeks flushed even deeper, and a giggle escaped her lips. After a brief conversation, she nodded, covering her mouth as if trying to suppress her excitement. Then, with one last look at Tyler, she dashed off in a flustered hurry.

Mathilda blinked. "What the heck just happened?"

"Talent," Tyler said smugly, sitting back down.

"You asked her if she wanted to meet you tonight, and she actually agreed," Mathilda muttered, crossing her arms. "Unbelievable."

"This is what years of training in flirting gets you."

"This is what being shameless gets you," she shot back with a playful scoff. "Well, fine. I didn't drag you out for nothing. Let's switch it up."

Today was supposed to be a quiet date—just Tyler and Mathilda spending time together. But as usual, the moment they were together, the chaos began. Whether it was seductive whispering, ridiculous banter, or dragging innocent women into their orbit, they somehow always caused a scene.

After that, they left the place,

"I had this idea," Mathilda said as she took another sip from her drink. "Let's play rich young master and loyal seductive maid. You know—money, power, charm, corrupting innocence."

Tyler raised an eyebrow. "You've been reading those raunchy novels again, haven't you?"

"Maybe," she winked. "Let's try it."

Without missing a beat, making sure no one is around, both of them activated their Phantom Masks and changed appearance. Tyler now looked like a handsome, arrogant young master from a wealthy family, draped in silk robes with golden threads. Mathilda transformed into a sultry maid with a revealing outfit and elegant posture, every bit the fantasy come to life.

"We've already booked someone for tonight," Mathilda said in a sultry tone, roleplaying. "So let's schedule the next victim for tomorrow night."

Just as Tyler was about to reply with something equally scandalous, their communication watches lit up and flickered.

"Urgent update," came Lily's voice, calm but firm. "Just got word. The real Phantom Pirates of the North are arriving at Veins Peak tomorrow. Get ready."

Tyler and Mathilda froze.

"Ehhhhh?" Mathilda groaned, slumping into her chair. "Guess that means no rich young master fun for now."

"Well, duty calls," Tyler said, but his grin remained.

Mathilda perked up again. "At least we still have time for her."

Without wasting a second, she dropped her disguise, pulled Tyler up, and dragged him along back to the innocent girl they just flirted now. After that she wasn't Innocent anymore.

They didn't even wait for nightfall.

Chapter 417: Arrival

Dark, bat-like creatures with oversized glowing eyes squirmed restlessly inside a reinforced iron cage. Their wings twitched, their skin glossy and obsidian, and their shrill, echoing screeches made the bystanders flinch. A bulky man grunted as he pushed the cart down the busy market street, trying to keep the creatures from tipping over.

"They're even selling Abyss Creatures now," Mathilda muttered, narrowing her eyes as one of the creatures hissed in her direction. "Should I buy some...?"

She turned her attention back to the street, where strange items from the seas and even from continent were being traded openly. Enchanted bones, whispering herbs, beast horns still dripping with blood—it was a chaotic mess of ancient mysticism and raw savagery.

Just then, Lily emerged from a tall building made of jade stones and inscribed with blue glowing runes. She held a parchment in one hand and wore a slightly annoyed expression.

"The NN network isn't connected to the main continent," Lily explained as she walked over. "And the Continent Network isn't synced to the North's channels. Sending messages to the academy quickly is basically impossible."

Mathilda raised a brow. "Tyler mentioned he wanted to divine something— something about the mysterious aura that has been sealed in his Glabella. If not for that 'mysterious friend' of his, he might've never noticed it. Even though there are no hidden dangers, he wanted to know who did that to him."

Lily nodded. "I already paid them to forward our message to the academy. Told them to send the reply from the academy to our NN ID. Might take a few months before we hear anything, though."

Mathilda sighed, brushing her hair back. "So where is our boss?"

"He said—" Lily replied with a pause , because she also noticed Abyss Creatures being sold, "He said he's changing identities and visiting every place for fun."

Mathilda was about to say something, but Lily continued, "Just like someone who dresses as Man and visiting all Brothels."

Mathilda froze, then scratched her cheek with a mischievous smirk.

The two women burst into laughter, drawing glances from nearby vendors. Even though they are in disguise, they still attracted some attention because of their beautiful voices. A peddler trying to sell a floating potion bottle paused mid-shout to look at them, only to hastily turn away when one of the Abyss Creatures growled.

"Alright," Lily said, her expression turning serious. "Let's go prepare to confront the Phantom Pirates of the North."

Mathilda's grin faded, replaced with a determined look. "After this there will be only One Phantom Pirates."

Without another word, the two women vanished from the bustling street in a flicker of shadow and mist, leaving only the faint scent of lavender.

"No news about them?" asked a soft, clear voice belonging to a delicate-looking girl with a slender frame. Her calm, almost detached expression didn't quite match the irritation lacing her tone.

"They're like real phantoms on the sea," replied the man sitting opposite her, a scout wrapped in traveler's robes. "They vanished as soon as they stepped foot on the island. Though they haven't stirred up anything for the past few months, everyone assumes they're just biding their time—waiting for the real Phantom Pirates to show up."

"Is that even considered information?" the girl sighed, brushing a finger around the rim of her glass. "Everybody knows that already. I was hoping to find them quickly and get this over with, but it seems that's not going to happen."

"My apologies for the inconvenience," the man said, bowing politely before leaving her alone.

The girl picked up her chilled fruit juice and took a sip, her eyes scanning the lively street through the open-air café. Just as she set the glass back down, another figure slid into the seat across from her.

"Huh... Masha, right?" the newcomer said with a grin.

Masha blinked and tilted her head. "Do I know you?"

"We've met before," the man said, leaning back with an air of familiarity. "I'm in disguise right now, but you once mentioned you wanted to marry me, remember?"

Masha stared, then her eyes widened slightly. "Tyler White?"

"Yub," he said with a wink. "So, what brings the member of Justice Bandits to Veins Peak? Is this your clone?"

"I came here for business," Masha replied with a soft chuckle. "And yes, this is a clone. My real body looks different from this one—well, maybe our faces are still similar. This clone's just... easier to send on errands."

The two slipped into an easy rhythm of conversation, speaking as if they were old friends reunited by chance. The street noise around them faded into the background.

"So," Tyler said, leaning forward a little, "anything I can help with?"

Masha smiled faintly, eyes half-lidded in thought. "Nothing for now. I'm just here to watch the show... The Phantoms."

"Ah, right," Tyler nodded. "I heard the Phantom Pirates of the North are arriving today. The buzz around them is insane. I just hope they don't end up being a letdown. It's been too quiet lately since the arrival of another Phantom group."

Masha glanced at him with a playful look. "And where's that fox girl who was always with you? She was powerful... and hard to ignore."

"She's here on the island, shopping," Tyler said, shrugging. "We're pretty much on vacation. Can't stay serious all the time."

After chatting for a while longer, Tyler gave her a grin. "Are you free after this? I mean, we've met twice already in the Northern Seas... Maybe it's fate."

Masha raised a brow, amused. "Are you flirting with me, Tyler White?"

"Probably. So, is that a yes?"

Masha laughed softly. "Alright. If we meet a third time, I'll give you an answer. Or, if you ask my original body instead of my clone..." She winked. "Then I'll say yes to that date."

She stood, her glass now empty, and left with a graceful turn.

Tyler watched her go, then muttered to himself, "Tsk... Bad habit... I even told her my identity."

He leaned back and sighed, a crooked smile tugging at his lips. Some habits were hard to break — especially around pretty girls with secrets.

A ship loomed at the distant horizon, steadily cutting through the sea like a ghostly predator from the depths. It was an ancient, towering vessel that resembled the haunted "Dead Man's Ships" from legendary seafaring tales—its dark wood creaked with every wave it rode, and its torn black sails fluttered like tattered wings.

At the ship's bow, a grotesque figurehead shaped like a screaming skull wept red-painted tears. The Jolly Roger hoisted high bore the same skull motif—blood streaming from hollow eyes—signifying death, vengeance, and nightmares long whispered about in taverns.

This was no ordinary pirate ship. It was the ship of the 'Real' Phantom Pirates.

On the deck stood a crew that seemed more myth than man. Each figure was tall and lean, with obsidian skin and piercing crimson eyes. They were Dark Elves, and their presence was otherworldly—each movement precise, each breath full of silent menace. Cloaked in black garments that absorbed the sunlight, they appeared as moving shadows with eyes of fire.

At the helm, the Captain stepped forward. His crimson gaze scanned the fog-shrouded peaks ahead. His voice, hoarse and graveled, broke the silence.

"We've arrived... Veins Peak," Captain Hody said, his tone filled with grim anticipation.

Beside him stood his Vice Captain—a young Dark Elf woman with silver hair cascading down her back. Her cloak barely covered her body, and beneath it, she wore little.

In her left hand, she held a leash. At the end of that leash knelt a middle-aged human woman, entirely naked, her body trembling and her eyes vacant with terror.

"What shall we do about the fakes?" the Vice Captain asked with a twisted smile, yanking on the leash. "Those pathetic frauds using our name like it's theirs."

Captain Hody chuckled darkly. "The client who invited us asked for a proper challenge, pirate to pirate. According to the old pirate codes, we must challenge them formally—defeat them.... humiliate them... and then take what is ours."

The crew let out a chilling cheer, fangs and red eyes gleaming beneath the shadows of their hoods.

"After we win," the captain continued, "we'll take them as our slaves— strip them of everything they have. Name, pride, freedom."

The Vice Captain's eyes lit up at that. "I heard there are beautiful women among them... especially one called Temptress." She licked her lips, her gaze distant with anticipation. "I want her. I want to trample her... break her... enjoy her."

She tossed off her cloak entirely, revealing her scant, exotic armor—little more than dark silk and leather straps designed more for seduction than battle. Her body shimmered with magical tattoos that pulsed faintly.

To emphasize her words, she leaned down and caressed the trembling human woman at her feet. A sinister glow passed from her fingers into the woman's skin. Instantly, the woman aged—wrinkles spread, her back bent, her life essence visibly drained. The Vice Captain let out a breathy moan, eyes closing in pleasure.

"Delicious," she whispered.

The crew remained silent, but their bloodlust was rising. Their time had come.

The ship pushed forward, waves parting as if in fear.

The 'Real' Phantom Pirates had arrived.

Chapter 418: Confrontation Between Phantoms

Just like the 'fake' Phantom Pirates who caused a stir with their theatrical arrival, the appearance of the so-called 'real' Phantom Pirates stirred another wave of attention among the immortal practitioners in Veins Peak.

A ghostly ship—blackened wood creaking with each wave, its sails tattered and marked with ominous sigils—emerged from the morning fog. Its arrival was eerie but unmistakable, moving like a shadow cast by something far darker. The ship bore a Jolly Roger not easily forgotten: a skull bleeding crimson tears.

Gasps rose from the portside crowd.

"Is that Shadow Pearl?..."

"No, It's them. The real Phantom Pirates."

The ghost-ship docked with slow, deliberate motion, drawing closer like a beast stalking its prey. A cloaked figure standing at the prow tossed a small leather pouch toward one of the dock attendants. The pouch hit the ground with a soft thud, revealing its contents—stacks of Lydia notes.

The man who threw the pouch stepped down from the ship, removing his hood to reveal long, pointed ears and ashen skin. His eyes gleamed like embers—cold, intelligent, and deadly.

The dark elf Captain

And not just him. Behind him marched his crew—dozens of dark elves with blood-red eyes, each shrouded in black cloaks or tattered battle garb. One, however, stood out starkly among them. A female

dark elf with provocative armor barely covering her voluptuous figure walked with seductive confidence. She held a leash attached to a middle-aged woman crawling on all fours—naked, bruised, and blank-eyed like a broken pet.

The dock attendant flinched. He turned to his colleague, sending a sound transmission:

"Should we charge them dock fees for the other Phantom Pirates who didn't pay?"

The second attendant, more experienced, responded with a simple hand gesture : Go ahead. Do the fuck you want.

The man turned back and saw how intimidating they are. He decided not to do.

Though intimidating, something was off.

"They're scary," whispered someone nearby, "but... not as dramatic as the first ones."

"Yeah. The other Phantom Pirates—those masked ones—their entrance was like a scene from a nightmare. This... this feels more like a nightmare that's been walking around for years."

Still, curiosity burned brighter than fear. Spectators began following the dark elves at a distance, hoping that the other Phantom Pirates— the so-called fakes — would show up.

And they did.

As the dark elves made their way toward the bustling town square, a strange mist rolled in. White, almost silver, creeping in tendrils along the ground, blanketing the square in a spectral haze. Rainclouds gathered overhead, darkening the skies in an unnatural gloom.

From within the mist, figures emerged.

Each wore a unique Phantom Mask. Their cloaks fluttered with invisible winds, and the auras they exuded were oppressive yet controlled — like thunderclouds ready to strike.

Phantom Blackwood and his crew had arrived.

The crowd gasped again. A duel of legends was about to begin. Meanwhile the Town Guards are debating whether to intervene or not if they started to Brawl.

The leader of the dark elves stepped forward, facing the masked man at the front.

"Phantom Blackwood," he greeted with a rasp.

"Kael Driftsbane," the masked man responded.

Another figure stepped forward from the dark elf crew—Talindra, the provocative woman with the leash. Her red eyes gleamed as they locked onto one specific figure among Blackwood's group.

"Temptress..." she purred.

Before anything else could be said, Temptress rolled her eyes and muttered, "Are we gonna keep calling out names like we're taking attendance? Get to the point."

Talindra grinned and caressed her leashed woman's head.

"Oh, but I'm already so tempted," she whispered, her voice dark with sadistic delight. She placed her hand on the woman's back, and with a soft breath, the middle-aged woman aged rapidly—skin shriveling, bones cracking, until she was little more than a husk.

Talindra moaned softly. "Mmm. Satisfying..."

Blackwood didn't flinch. "So are you here to just show off?"

Kael Driftsbane smirked. "We're here for the challenge. But first, let's agree to the terms. You showed up using our name. That makes it our name. So we're putting it on the line."

"The name Phantom Pirates?" Blackwood's voice was calm. "Sure. We'll put it up."

"That's not all," Kael added, his smirk deepening. "We want more. Your name... and your crew."

Talindra stepped forward, licking her lips. "Especially her. The Temptress. She's mine."

From behind Blackwood, Darla whispered through voice transmission, "She's definitely Mathilda's long-lost twin sister from the perverted side of the family."

"Let's not get ahead of ourselves," Temptress replied aloud. "First let's start the challenge. Then talk about fantasies."

Kael nodded. "We'll face off after the Auction. You better have something worth fighting for. Don't loose too Quickly."

"We'll be there," Blackwood said simply.

As Kael turned to leave, Talindra lingered a little longer. She walked past Temptress slowly, deliberately swaying her hips. Suddenly, smack—a sharp slap landed on her rear.

Talindra turned in surprise.

MC winked, rubbing her palm playfully.

"She let me hit her," MC grinned.

"I noticed palm," Talindra muttered. "And I didn't stop her."

With that, she followed the rest of her crew, disappearing into the darkened mist. As the clouds broke and sunlight returned, Phantom Blackwood and his group vanished again—like ghosts returning to shadow.

Moments later, a figure flew in from above. Masha landed with her boots clicking on the pavement.

"Oh, come on! I missed them again?!"

She was frustrated. Phantom Blackwood and his crew were the very reason she'd come to this island. And every time she was a step too late.

She stood there for a moment, sighing, looking up toward the sky that was now a clear, soft blue.

"Please show up at the auction..." Masha muttered under her breath, her boots tapping against the cobbled path as she turned away from the empty square.

"Found you."

"Huh?" Masha blinked and turned around. A young boy stood there with a mischievous glint in his eyes.

Then she narrowed hers. "Tyler?"

"Yup. Back in disguise," he said with a casual grin. "So... what are you upto now?"

"Eh... still got some things on my to-do list," Masha said, stretching her arms behind her head. "But they got postponed."

"Oh? So that mean you're free now?" Tyler asked.

Masha raised an eyebrow. "Ya askin' me out, mister?"

"You're the one who said if I find you again, I should ask."

"Hah, fair 'nuff. A deal's a deal," Masha shrugged.

A few minutes later, the two of them sat inside a high-end bar, one with quiet music, floating candles, and Prana-infused air that shimmered slightly under the lights. Masha was already a bit red in the face, swirling a glass of amber liquid with lazy circles.

"Nah, see... I meant after I leave this island. Or if ya somehow found my real body," she said, poking Tyler's cheek with her finger. "Seriously... ya really wanna bang my clone?"

Tyler smirked and took a sip of his Prana Mule. "How about both?"

"Hehe... bold answer. But lemme tell ya, you gotta work real hard if ya wanna keep up with me," Masha said, leaning back. "Most boys 'n girls don't like my main body anyway."

What Masha didn't realize was that anyone who saw her real body practically wanted to kneel and call her Mommy—but she was too dense to ever notice.

"You'll run away too..." she muttered quietly, more to herself than to him. Then her lips moved again, just barely: "That Manhunter... she's the only one..."

Her voice trailed off, too soft for Tyler to catch the rest.

Noticing the shift in mood, Tyler waved his hand. A bartender approached and placed a new drink in front of her—vodka laced with shimmering, edible Prana Pearls.

"Hey now, don't drown in sorrow," he said gently, "Drown in Alcohol."

Masha scoffed as she eyed the glowing drink. "Sorrow? Me?"

She took a long sip, then leaned forward, her expression half-lidded but her voice suddenly clear and bitter. "When someone's alive, people take 'em for granted. Act like nothin' matters. Then one day they're gone—poof—and suddenly, life feels hollow. Like ya dropped somethin' important but can't remember what it was. Regret comes knockin' way too late."

She downed the rest of the vodka and Prana Pearls in one gulp, the glowing spheres sliding down her throat like liquid stars.

"But me?" she continued, her gaze distant. "I didn't feel nothin' when my brother died. Not a damn thing."

Tyler stayed quiet. His hand paused halfway to his drink.

"He was weak. Pathetic. I never liked him. He got himself killed in the South Seas. Phantom Blackwood sliced him."

Tyler's eyes twitched, but he kept his expression unreadable.

"I ain't here for revenge," Masha said, staring into the empty glass. "People die in the sea all the time. That's how it goes. But... sometimes... a sister's just gotta say she's avengin' her brother, even if she don't mean it."

She pushed the glass forward. Tyler gave a nod, and the bartender silently placed a refill.

"But enough 'bout me," Masha said with a half-smile. "What 'bout you, huh? I wanna hear all 'bout yer wild adventures. Don't go holdin' out on me."

Tyler chuckled. "Oh, where do I even start? Let me tell you how I ended up in the Abyss..."

And just like that, the heaviness lifted. The two of them sat there, sharing drinks and stories—two drifters, scarred and strange, finding warmth in each other's chaos.

Chapter 419: Auction

There are two major reasons why travelers, merchants, and even pirates rarely dare to act recklessly on Veins Peak.

The first: the island is home to three Divine Seeker Warriors and one Divine Seeker Mage— powerful Immortal Practitioners said to be in deep seclusion, preparing to make a breakthrough into the Immortal Realm. While they remain unseen, the threat of their presence is more than enough. Any sign of significant disturbance, and these reclusive titans are known to emerge and personally obliterate the troublemakers. It's happened before. And no one wants to be the next example.

The second reason is more political, yet equally fearsome—the island flies the flag of the Federation. A blue kingfisher symbol ripples on banners across the port, towns, and villages. That flag is more than just fabric. It's a warning.

The Federation is one of the top three powerhouses of this world, standing shoulder to shoulder with the Bank of Atlantis and the Ocean Overlords. These three factions dominate the Northern territories, and crossing any of them is suicidal, especially for those without a backer.

In a cozy inn near the auction district, Lily handed Tyler a scroll.

"Here's the auction item list," she said.

Tyler unrolled it and blinked. "Wow. So ancient... Didn't they hear of paper sheets? Anyway—" his eyes scanned the list quickly, then paused. "Ahhh, I really want to go there as Tyler White, buy everything I want, and just clean out the whole auction hall!"

"You can't," Lily reminded him flatly. "We need to be careful. If both Tyler White and the Phantom Pirates keep showing up in the same places, it'll raise too many eyebrows. For now, you may be obscure, but that won't last forever."

"Alright, alright, Madam Caution," Tyler chuckled. "Then let's go as Phantom Pirates. I really want the Northern Spring Tea Leaves. Oh, and Shi no Kasa."

"I thought we already had that tea," Lily said, raising an eyebrow.

Tyler leaned in, eyes gleaming. "No, not that one. We only got some knock offs. This Tea is rare can be produced only in 4 or 5 places in the whole world. There's only one packet in the entire auction. And one is all we need."

The day of the auction arrived with much anticipation. Hosted by the Merchant Society— a powerful alliance of northern traders— it was one of the most significant events in the Veins Peak region. The Society existed to unify the northern merchants and protect their shared interests, creating a balance of power even pirates respected.

The auction was held in a grand domed hall shaped like a lotus bud carved out of mountain stone. Entry required an invitation, which could cost anywhere from 5,000 to 10,000 Lydia. It was expensive... at least for Ordinary Immortal Practitioners. Just by selling tickets they made lot of profits.

As guests arrived—adventurers in travel gear, proud merchants in ornate robes, and pirates clad in rough luxury—Tyler and his group vanished into the crowd, their disguises in place.

A familiar face soon made an entrance. Ruban of the Shade Merchant House swaggered in, waving his invitation like a trophy. He shot smug glances at those in line and strolled through the gates with practiced arrogance.

Moments later, the sky dimmed. Fog slithered across the streets. The air grew thick with eerie anticipation.

The 'fake' Phantom Pirates had arrived.

Tyler and the girls, dressed in their signature Phantom attire, walked through the mist. Tyler casually tossed a few high-grade invitations at the guards without even looking at them. His aura, combined with the group's mystique, left no one daring to question their presence.

Inside, the main auction chamber was a circular hall with multiple viewing cabins—private rooms for elite guests. Tyler and his group were given one such cabin, secluded but with a perfect view of the auction stage.

As for 'Real' Phantom Pirates only Kael Driftsbane and Talindra has arrived already.

As they entered, a group of elegant maids stood ready to serve them.

But one of the Phantom girls – MC (Mathilda) – was eyeing them like a predator scanning prey.

The tension was unbearable.

"All of you. Out," Phantom Blackwood (Tyler) said with a deep voice.

The maids bowed and fled in a hurry, clearly relieved to escape that suffocating atmosphere.

Once they were alone, the group took their seats, some sipping tea, others simply watching the crowd gather.

People of all kinds filled the space— beastmen, Fishmen, elves and humans, all drawn by the lure of rare treasures.

Then the lights dimmed slightly, and a figure emerged onto the stage. The crowd burst into enthusiastic applause.

A stunning figure stepped forward, adorned in flowing blue robes with glittering gems. A long peacock tail shimmered behind her.

"Well, well," Phantom Blackwood said, raising a brow. "Isn't that flashy?"

But neither he nor MC looked impressed. In fact, their expressions were blank.

"Hey MC," Phantom Blackwood whispered. "Ain't only male peacocks supposed to have beautiful tails?"

"You're absolutely right," MC replied. "And this one? Not a girl. I didn't feel even a spark when he walked out."

Down on the stage, the host raised her hand and smiled.

"Welcome, everyone, to the Blue Tide Auction, proudly organized by the Blue Tide Merchant House, in collaboration with the Northern Merchant Society," she announced. "I am Ashe Transella, your host for today."

Applause erupted once more, and Phantom leaned back in his chair.

Somewhere across the auction hall, Kael Driftsbane and Talindra of the 'Real' Phantom Pirates sat quietly in another reserved cabin. Unlike Tyler's crew, they weren't interested in tea leaves.

Soon, The Auction began.

"These are ancient knives retrieved from a ruin by one of our brave adventurers," Ashe announced, her voice echoing confidently across the grand auction hall. Two girls in elegant robes stepped onto the stage, carrying a glass container. Inside it gleamed five distinctive knives, each shaped differently and glowing faintly with a different hue.

"These blades possess unique attributes—some elemental, others enchanted with defensive or speed-enhancing properties. A rare find indeed."

In their private viewing cabin, Phantom Blackwood and the girls leaned forward with mild interest, observing the flow of the auction without reacting much. The knives, though valuable, weren't what they had come for.

The bidding began at 50,000 Lydia, and quickly escalated.

"55,000."

"68,000."

"79,000."

"94,000!"

The final bid echoed. The set was sold at 94,000 Lydia, and applause followed.

Next came a sequence of standard but valuable items—pills that could enhance aura sensitivity, potions for elemental resistance, and herbs cultivated in remote frozen valleys of the north. Mathilda, under her alias MC, made a bid for a shimmering silvery herb known as "Frostbloom Dewleaf," snagging it for a solid 150,000 Lydia.

Then, the moment Blackwood had been waiting for arrived.

Ashe smiled wider as her hand signaled for the next item. "Now, this one's a little different. Neither pill nor potion, nor rare combat ingredient — this is a tea."

Whispers began to ripple through the crowd.

"But not just any tea," Ashe continued. "This is Northern Spring Tea. One of the rarest and most expensive teas in the world. A delicate and refined cultivation enhancer."

A servant girl carried a crystal tray with a single, small packet sealed in golden paper. Inside were brownish leaves—resembling four-leaf clovers dried to perfection. It didn't look like much. But those who knew, knew.

"This packet makes exactly four cups," Ashe said, her tone serious. "And here is the certification from our Merchant Society, verifying authenticity."

The seal of the Merchant Society was revered in the northern seas. Their word was law when it came to trade. Anything bearing their mark was instantly trustworthy— and priced accordingly.

"The bidding for Northern Spring Tea starts at 80,000 Lydia," Ashe declared.

"82,000 Lydia," a merchant called out immediately.

"84,000 Lydia," said another, voice laced with hesitation.

Then came a cool, clear voice from Phantom Blackwood's cabin.

"100,000 Lydia," Darla announced.

The room fell quiet.

Jumping straight to 100,000 Lydia wasn't unheard of— but doing so so confidently sent a message. This group wanted this tea, and they weren't interested in playful bargaining.

Whispers and murmurs rose around the hall.

"Must be rich adventurers... or nobles in disguise."

"Who pays that much for tea?"

"Unless they're serious tea addicts..."

Despite the surprise, a few dared to push.

"101,000 Lydia," said a woman from the east corner.

Darla rolled her eyes behind her mask. "110,000 Lydia."

That ended it. The bidding war dissolved immediately. It was just a small packet, after all. Most weren't interested in paying more than market value.

In another cabin, Talindra— the scantily dressed vice-captain of the 'Real' Phantom Pirates— watched the interaction with amused eyes. She ran her hand along the maid serving her, openly groping her rear.

"How cute," she drawled, her red eyes sparkling. "They're really bidding this hard... for tea."

"Don't concern yourself with them," Kael Driftsbane, her captain, replied flatly. "Once we beat them, everything they own will be ours anyway."

Talindra chuckled. "Including that one with the smug face? What was she called... Temptress?"

"Focus," Kael muttered. "We're only here for two things— Shi no Kasa and the Nascent Divinity Pills. After that, we take care of them."

They had already noticed the other Phantom Pirates in the auction hall. Kael didn't care that the originals and the fakes were under the same roof. In his mind, only one group would walk away worthy of the name.

Chapter 420: 420. Shi no Kasa

Molten Lava Shield.

Air Breaker Spear.

Heaven-Defying Typhoon Glider.

The complete story of Reverend Insanity and Tales of Demons and Gods.

Treasure after treasure was presented on the glowing auction platform. The crowd of merchants, adventurers, nobles, and pirates alike buzzed with excitement. Bidding wars erupted. Fortunes changed hands like pocket change. Artifacts long lost to time returned to the world in gilded trays and shimmering light.

Tyler, in disguise as Phantom Blackwood, sat lazily in the private cabin alongside his crew. He occasionally tossed out bids, not because he wanted the items, but just to see if someone would outbid him for sport.

"Molten Lava Shield, huh," he muttered. "Not bad. Let's buy it and give it to all the crew members."

Mathilda sat beside him, swirling a glass of fruity spirit, kicking her leg as she browsed through the auction list with a yawn. "Call me when they bring out something spicy. I'm not here to see overpriced paperweights."

Even Lily, usually composed, glanced up with a glimmer of interest when a glowing jade slip containing the Complete Story of Reverend Insanity was brought forward. She almost bid on it but decided against it at the last second.

The auction was in full swing, but soon, the atmosphere shifted.

"The next item is something everyone has been eagerly anticipating," Ashe Transella, the host, stepped forward again. Her peacock-feathered gown glowed with ethereal light. She raised a hand, and the hall fell quiet.

Her voice was calm but carried across the entire hall like a breeze laced with mana. "Before we begin bidding, allow me to share a tale..."

The lights dimmed slightly, and an ethereal spotlight centered on her as she spoke.

"Long ago, in the depths of the sea, a ruin was discovered—a hidden village belonging to a mysterious people known as the Ninja. They were said to be the pinnacle of assassins during their era, shadows that danced between life and death. Among them was a girl unlike any other, born with the power of darkness and death. Anyone who touched her perished instantly. Cursed by her own gifts, she lived in isolation. But despite that, her heart remained pure. Through strength and compassion, she moved the hearts of those around her and eventually became their queen. She was called the Death Queen."

Murmurs echoed across the hall.

"She always carried an umbrella, never letting it out of her grasp. That very umbrella was discovered in the ruins, perfectly preserved beneath layers of sea. It has since been named... Shi no Kasa — the Umbrella of Death."

Two attendants carefully rolled out a glass cylinder. Suspended within was a red oil-paper umbrella, slowly spinning in the air, shimmering softly under the enchanted lights.

"This," Ashe gestured to the item, "is Shi no Kasa—the Umbrella of Death."

Despite its ominous name, the umbrella was strikingly beautiful. It exuded a quiet dignity, a stillness that spoke louder than any weapon.

Ashe continued, "There were concerns, of course. Some feared the umbrella might still carry remnants of the Death Queen's curse. But according to myth, she took her curse with her when she reincarnated, ensuring that her past wouldn't haunt the world any longer."

As she finished her tale, Ashe drew a blade from her side. It radiated the unmistakable energy of a Master-ranked artifact.

"To prove its power..."

She stabbed the umbrella.

The blade shattered.

Gasps and murmurs erupted through the crowd once again.

"The current owner cannot yet awaken its abilities. It remains a mystery. But one thing is certain: this artifact once belonged to an immortal. What secrets it holds are waiting to be discovered."

She raised her hand, signaling the start of the bid. "The bidding for Shi no Kasa begins at... one million Lydia."

"One and a half million!"

"Two million!"

"Five million!" a confident voice rang out.

All eyes turned. It was Kael Driftsbane, the infamous dark elf captain of the so-called 'Real Phantom Pirates.' His red eyes glinted with challenge.

But the hall remained restless.

"Five point one million."

"Ten million."

"Twenty million!" Kael barked again, clearly annoyed at being challenged.

"Twenty point one million."

"Thirty million!"

The tension escalated.

"Something's wrong..." Kael muttered, he noticed something.

"Say forty million," Talindra whispered beside him, lounging with her legs draped over the arm of the chair.

Kael nodded. "Forty million Lydia."

And immediately, from another cabin, the voice replied: "Forty point one million."

Kael's eye twitched. "Forty-one million."

"Forty-one point one million."

"Who the hell is doing that?!" Kael growled.

"Pretty obvious," Talindra laughed, her fingers tracing lazy circles on the armrest. "It's Phantom Blackwood. That cocky bastard."

Kael clenched his jaw. "He's not even trying to win. He's just pushing my bids. He is clearly mocking me."

"Heh. Petty. But effective," Talindra replied with a grin. "Too bad he's a guy. If he were a woman, I might've captured him."

Their brief clash didn't attract much attention—not because it wasn't intense, but because everyone's eyes were glued to the center of the stage.

All focus remained on the umbrella.

As the numbers climbed past fifty million Lydia, one by one, the other bidders quietly stepped down. The price had long since surpassed reason—even for an artifact once wielded by an immortal.

And yet, the war continued.

But in the end... who could truly stop Tyler White?

Behind the mask of Phantom Blackwood, is the richest person on that Auction Hall, even that whole Island.

And then came the final blow.

"Seventy-five million Lydia!"

The hall went dead silent.

Even Kael Driftsbane fell back into his chair, stunned and seething. Talindra's eyes narrowed, but she didn't speak. She just licked her lips and let out a slow, amused whistle.

Ashe Transella's eyes sparkled with anticipation and drama as she slammed her gavel down with a dramatic flourish.

Whispers echoed across the room.

"The Phantom Pirates have that kind of money?"

"Who is funding them?"

"Wait, is this guy really a pirate... or a hidden Noble family?"

"Sold! Shi No Kasa belongs to Mr. Phantom Blackwood!" she declared, her voice ringing with excitement.

Cheers, groans, and stunned silence filled the hall. No one expected the fake Phantom Pirates to pull such a stunt—and win.

And as if to make matters more confusing, they didn't even pay in Lydia.

Instead, Phantom Blackwood's group sent forward a treasure chest filled with shimmering Aura and Prana stones.

It was entirely within the auction rules—alternate payment methods were allowed. However, few ever used anything other than Lydia.

According to the current market exchange, one Lydia was equivalent to eighty-six Aura or Prana stones. By that value...

Tyler had just spent over 6.4 billion stones.

Six. Point. Four. Billion.

All for a single red umbrella.

"Why didn't they just pay in Lydia?" someone muttered.

The answer?

Because Phantom Blackwood's account didn't have that much of cash.